



*Bertram Mills' clowns
visit children at Hospital,
April 1969*

264.13

Cambridge CIRCUS Chronicle by Mike Petty

c.76.2 : circus

1893

Readers have responded with information on Keith and Tudor's circus on Midsummer Common. Mr R. Bainbridge says it was a large wooden building at the junction of Victoria Avenue, where the lamp standard is, at the corner of Jesus Grove. It was pulled down due to the expense of standing there and rebuilt at the bottom of Auckland Road. Mr Keith was the ring master and Mr Tudor was the clown. Sam George competed for a cup given by the late Charlie Rowell. It was a race 20 times around the ring over four hurdles every round. The circus finished late 1893 or early 1894 just before the Royal Show was held on Midsummer Common. He still has some of the building that was built into a shed. 37 01 16f

'One with a memory' writes: "My father put Tudor's circus up twice in Cambridge and once in Ipswich and eventually at the Romsey Town Cement Works, where the main part still stands and is used by Messrs Macintosh for their ever-increasing agricultural department". He has a bill, dated June 1895 which includes six shillings and fivepence for 38 pints of beer from the 'Duke of Cambridge' for the workers. Another reader recalls Samuel Murfitt from Manea, the largest man in the world, who died 50 years ago. His girth was 100 inches and as no hearse could be found large enough he had to be conveyed on a flat. The sashes had to be taken from the windows and nearly 20 men were employed to get the body out. 37 01 22e

1897 04 19

At Cambridge Easter Sunday was celebrated in all the churches. Congregations were very large and most of the places of worship were tastefully decorated, white flowers largely predominating. On Monday a goodly number of people followed the Volunteers in their march to Madingley, others watched the Boys Brigade movements on the University Range. Amusements were provided by the sports on Fenners and the circus in the afternoon

1897 04 20

Fourpowers circus & menagerie, p3

1897 04 29

At Cambridge County Court Alfred Whitmee, circus proprietor said he visited Shelford with his circus in the autumn of 1896. On the Monday it was a rough day and he could not get the tent up. The month of October was an unfortunate one for him. He owed 30s.(shillings) at Histon and about 7s at Trumpington. He had arranged to start for Sawston but was told he could not take anything away until £2.0.6 was paid for lodging his horses. 1897 04 29

1897 05 25

Tudor's new circus, p3

1897 06 01

Tudor's new circus, p2

1897 06 08

Tudor's circus, p2

1897 06 15

Mr Tudor's circus have contrived week after week to place before their patrons a programme not entirely different from those preceding it. The last item on the programme is contributed by the Canadian troupe of comic and scientific skaters, one of the men representing a policeman of goodly proportions, his clothes being apparently inflated to bursting point! His many tumbles and his bounciness when on the ground do not fail to convulse the spectators 1897 06 15

1897 07 20

Tudors Circus, p2

1897 08 24

Tudors Circus p3

1897 09 27

Sangers circus, p3

1898 08 02

Bank Holiday – Tudor's circus, p2

1898 08 03

Tudor's circus advert, p1

1898 08 15

William Tudor circus proprietor nearly drowned, p2

1898 08 15 c

It maybe that the police have influence with the Clerk of the weather. Anyway the sun beamed down full face on the righteous and the unrighteous, and incidentally on those congregated at the Leys to witness the annual sports of the Borough Police. And as evidence not only of the love of Cambridge

folk for sport, but also of their friendship for their blue-tuniced guardians, it may be mentioned that there was a large attendance. Adding much to the enjoyment of the company, Madame Frederica with her toy terriers, and Mr Fred Derrick the well-known entertainer from Tudor's Circus, gave some clever exhibitions.

1898 08 23

The Barnum and Bailey great street parade will be a wonderful and stupendous spectacle of men, women, children, horses, elephants, wild beasts, chariot, cars and floats. Christopher Columbus, as well as scores of other characters famous in his time, are all truthfully represented in rich costumes. Leading the pageant is one of the most magnificent sights imaginable, a wondrous team of 40 fine bay horses driven by one man. There are rich displays of open dens of wild beasts and carved golden chariots, containing the splendid zoological collections, followed by 20 elephants, and allegorical chariots, illustrating nursery rhymes and children's fairy stories. The whole affair is grand and inspiring CDN 1898 08 23

1898 08 27

Cambridge, the one and only, Barnum and Bailey Greatest Show on Earth, grounds on Huntingdon Road, September 8th. An overwhelming equestrian department, teeming with every valuable attraction, filled with wonders, overflowing with grand features, crowded with startling surprises, brimful of novelties, running over with mirthful scenes, and abounding with thrilling sensations and glorious events. Presenting, in vast Amplitude of Detail, Wild Beast, Chariot and Pedestrian Races, Fearless Contests, Trials of Speed, Skill and Endurance. A World's Fair of modern marvels. 1,000 men, women, giants, midgets, dwarfs, tattooed people, sword swallowers, bearded and long-haired lady, dog-faced boy, armless and legless men, snake charmers. 1,000 marvellous sights and curious creations. One ticket admits to all the attractions. (Advert) CDN 1898 08 27

1898 08 31

The securing of the Midsummer Common for the show grounds of the Barnum and Bailey's Circus, having been completed, they have found it necessary to make a change in a number of their plans for the visit to Cambridge. The large number of excursionists from the country districts who will be attracted by the presence of the show will be thankful for the change. It will be possible to enjoy the evening show with comfort, in the consciousness that it is easy to catch the trains afterwards. The big show will arrive in Cambridge on four special trains, with a total of 74 railway cars. The unloading will be done in the G.E. railway yards, and the entire city of canvas, 14 tents in all, will be put up in the morning before the parade starts out. Every bit of the show is coming to Cambridge CDN 1898 08 31

1898 09 08

Today Cambridgeshire folk in their thousands have seen the procession of the "greatest show on earth" and now they can exist through the remainder of a dull vacation chewing, mentally, the cud of their reflections. Before dawn Barnum-struck people could be found waiting for the arrival of the monsters and wonders of the world. And then for hours there was a steady traffic of all manner of men and beasts and creeping things. Huge elephants and gilded cars, endless teams of horses - a continual movement of deliberate and well-ordered detail. First came four of our borough police, looking as smart as possible on their coal black steeds, though somewhat warm. The Sun came out full faced to see the show. It was broiling hot! Many a grizzled old agriculturist who came to scoff remained to praise, and exclaimed perpetually on the beautiful cattle. In their cages, amid lions, bears, wolves and hyenas came one after another keeper, calmly sitting on his stool, cynically surveying the wonder-struck lines of the town's and country's curious. Then the spectacular pageant, "The return of Columbus to Barcelona", another band, the elephants wearing strange and curious instruments representative of far off climes, and at length that vast array of the world's collected curios is past. Everyone is going to see the show. For hours the box office has been a Klondike CDN 1898 09 08

1899 03 07

Sanger circus advert, p4

1899 03 16

Sanger's circus, p2

1899 04 04

Tudor's Circus, p4

1899 04 18

Tudor's circus provides thoroughly enjoyable evening's amusement, and large numbers continue to take advantage of the efficient catering. This week Mr Tudor has been successful in securing the services of George Lockhart and his troupe of performing elephants. They perform many clever tricks & a series of gymnastics exercises. The smallest of the three rides a tricycle around the arena; the older two waltz to slow music and the three combine in a short - happily short - concert and perform other diverting antics. The turn arouses a great deal of enthusiasm, and is really worth seeing 1899 04 18

1899 04 25

Tudor's Circus, Auckland road, Cambridge. At great expense. Engagement of the greatest Wonder on Earth. The Colibris midgets, nine in number, nine Liliputian people as read of in Gulliver's travels. These miniature male and female artistes ranging from 21 to 29 inches in height, acknowledged to be the marvels of the age. See the midget acrobatics, the midget Christy minstrels, the midget gymnastics and equilibrists, the midget musical grotesques, the midget vocalists. See their handsome midget ponies and the magnificent miniature carriages – Advert 1899 04 25

1899 05 23

Tudor's circus p2

1900

1900 06 05

Tudor's circus, p2

1900 07 18

The proprietor of Tudor's Circus of Varieties, Cambridge was sued by Foulger's Band. They had been hired for three weeks. The band was composed of five performers – cornet, piano, euphonium & two violins. They were each paid £1.12s.6d. per week. On the first night it was a "scratch band" as Mr Foulger could not be there, & the pianist could not accept the engagement. An important feature in the performance was singing and dancing but a piano was not an essential part of the orchestra. The only complaint was from an inferior artiste who could not sing & had no music 00 07 18

1900 10 30

It is doubtful whether a better programme has been presented at the Cambridge Circus of Varieties than that given this week. Mr Fred Brooks has probably appeared before the Cambridge public more than any artiste on the boards – first at Sturton Town Hall and later at Arcadia. He has lost none of his vocal ability and the best of his songs is "Good old Cambridge", a topical effusion 00 10 30

1900 11 07

Lord John Sanger's circus is paying its annual visit to Cambridge. The spacious marquee is erected on Midsummer Common. This afternoon's performance was somewhat sparsely patronised. The absence of children was especially noticeable. This was probably due to a warning issued by the medical authorities to parents that they would "incur considerable danger if they were allowed to attend the performances" in view of the prevalence of diphtheria. The performance will be repeated this evening when a football match between a "centre-forward" elephant and a Cambridge footballer will be played CDN 1900 11 07

1901 04 09

The circus in Auckland Road, Cambridge, reopened on Eastern Monday, Mr G.S. King having become the sole lessee for a year. Leonie Clarke's cats are the prime attraction. Cats of all sizes and colour go through a performance the like of which has never previously been seen in Cambridge. Rope and wire-walking and balancing are all done with consummate care and a fine specimen of the feline tribe descends from the top of the building by means of a parachute. Rats and mice feature largely in the performance. The animals do everything but talk CDN 1901 04 09

1901 08 20

Circus, p2

1902 04 03

Thomas Askham applied for a licence for the public performance of stage plays at the Circus of Varieties, Auckland Road, Cambridge and presented a petition of 900 signatures in favour. The Committee would recommend it on condition that the old buildings were pulled down, that electric light was placed throughout and at least four hydrants connected with the water supply. Plans would have to be produced. Mr Askham intimated his willingness to do so. 02 04 03

1902 05 13

Circus of Varieties, p3

1902 06 04

The following notice has been issued by the Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University. "Whereas the attendance of members of the University at certain public exhibitions, performances and places of dramatic entertainment has been productive of grave disorder, notice is given that the attendance of any member in statu pupillari at the Circus of Varieties, Auckland Road, is prohibited and will render him liable to be punished by suspension, rustication, expulsion or otherwise." 02 06 04

1902 09 02

An entirely new company is responsible for the programme at the Auckland Road Circus, Cambridge this week. The judicious mixture of "turns" by music hall artists and items by circus performers of the old stamp seems to find favour with Cambridge audiences. Miss Babette Rose, a clever vocalist and dancer merited the applause awarded her. Ecnarf, a wire walker was vigorously applauded and one of the most enjoyable items was a clever act on horse back by Miss Daniels. The Sisters Korosko Bale gave a clever exhibition of juggling, a feature being their performing pigeons. 02 09 02

1902 12 30

The Auckland Road Circus, Cambridge, has re-opened under the name of the Empire Circus of Varieties and enjoyment of an excellent nature is assured at each performance. Several excellent 'turns' are included in this week's programme including the London serio-vocalist comedian, George Egerton and the first appearance in Cambridge of Leno, the midget comedian. The Great Dakota, an American necromancer in original stage illusions, keeps the audience in wonderment and laughter from the start. 02 12 30

1903 03 06

Thomas Askham was summoned for presenting a stage play, "Robinson Crusoe", at the Grand Circus and Hippodrome, Auckland Road, Cambridge, the building not being licensed as a theatre. There was pantomime action and considerable dialogue in verse. There was a temporary stage with scenery at the back and footlights. But it could not be described as a play, it was only an entertainment. The Theatre catered for the 'Varsity and the better classes and the more humble people went to this music-hall and circus. 03 03 06 [4.4]

1903 04 06

An inquest was held on the former assistant manager of the Empire Theatre of Varieties, Cambridge. He had deposited £10 as security on taking the post and after he had held the position for a month this was to be returned to him in instalments. But the company was a failure and he had lost his savings in

the venture. He had pawned his watch for half-a-crown and said he did not have a farthing. But he had £40 in his bank and his mind must have been deranged by his theatrical reverses. 03 04 06

1903 04 28

Mr Askham applied for a theatrical licence for the Auckland Road Circus, Cambridge. A dramatic performance was instructive to the working classes and tended to keep them out of public houses. But those who were labouring in connection with the various religious organisations felt strongly it would be injurious to the morals of the people. As soon as the audience came out they were 'on the Common in the dark'. A poster for one play contained the figure of a young lady almost in a state of nudity and if a man took his wife or daughter in the vicinity of it the ladies would hardly know where to put their heads. 03 04 28

1903 06 11

Circus of Varieties, p4

1904 04 05

A new era in the chequered existence of Cambridge's second place of entertainment, the Empire in Auckland Road, has opened. Hitherto its reputation for providing entertainment has not been entirely faultless but the new programme revealed a pleasant change and there was a packed audience. Performers included an impersonator of characters in the works of Charles Dickens, the Danby-Gordon Trio who displayed a tragic interlude entitled 'The Penalty' and Miss Gladys Fontaine, a singer with a cultivated contralto voice. Two comedians amused with 'patter' and songs of 'nonsense rhymes' and music was supplied by Miss Zetti Handel's Ladies Orchestra. 04 04 05

1904 04 19

Empire circus

1904 06 15

One day only. The one exhibition in the world that has no counterpart: Buffalo Bill's Wild West and congress of Rough Riders of the World headed and personally introduced by Col W.F. Cody, 'Buffalo Bill'. Three special trains, 500 horses, 800 people. 100 Redskin braves including the famous warriors of the Sioux, Ogallallas, Brutes, Uncapappas, Cheyenne and Apache tribes in Indian pastimes and war dances. Includes the Battle of Little Big Horn, Custer's last rally. The vast arena illuminated at night by special electric light plants. The entire grand programme will positively be presented twice daily (Rain or Shine). Dennis James' Fields, Huntingdon Road, Cambridge. Friday June 24th – Advert.

See Buffalo Bill, the master exponent of horseback marksmanship in his wonderful exhibition of shooting while riding a galloping horse. Introducing the pioneers of the plains who tell the story of the progress in the great drama of civilisation by pictures of border life. The stage coach 'hold-up'. Cowboys' 'round-up'. Riding wild bucking broncos. Indian war dances. Attack on the Emigrant train. The intrepid cowboy cyclist. Imperial Japanese troupe in ancient and modern war drill. Mexican Vanqueros. South American Gauchos. Cuban Patriots. – Advert.

On Friday Cambridge is to be visited by Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders. Beside the usual features of the show including Indian war dances, riding of wild bucking horses and a realistic scene of General Custer's last battle there will be a thrilling and daring bicycle feat of descending from a height of 85 feet and cycling through the air over a chasm of 41 feet, perhaps the most spectacular and dangerous of all bicycle novelties. The unique character of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was reflected in the character of the audiences, immense in number which the two Cambridge performances drew. Staid college professors, busy professional men and members of the clergy formed not an inconsiderable number of those who watched the performance with as much interest as the most ingenious juvenile and applauded as loudly as any. It is not everybody who has the opportunity to seeing a cowboy in his characteristic costume but the representation of incidents that have long since become historic were most interesting. There is no Deadwood coach now except in Colonel Cody's show and pony express riding has been superseded by the trans-continental railroad

and the telegraph but he preserves the ancient method of carrying letters for the benefit of another age. Cambridge people thoroughly appreciated the visit. 1904 06 15

1904 09 29

Circus glanders, p4 *

1904 10 08

Many old people will remember the time when Newsome's Circus was a great institution in Cambridge. For many years they conducted a permanent circus here and became very well known in the town, but of late years they have dropped out of the public gaze. James Newsome is still alive – aged 80 years of age – but his wife Pauline has just quitted the ring for ever. She died at Cleethorpes last week, at the age of 79. CDN 8.10.1904

1905 09 12

The Auckland Road variety theatre, Cambridge is now known as the Hippodrome. It has been taken over by Geo. Saphrini who has experience at the Britannia Theatre, Glasgow and Alex Aubrey who has performed at all the principal halls in Great Britain. Although the old circus ring has been retained there were no equestrian turns but Professor Garford's performing dogs and pigeons proved very wonderful and the hundreds who filled the building saw feats of agility and strength and extraordinary examples of human dexterity.. The programme was to have concluded with a bioscope exhibition but owing to a mishap with the lamp the pictures could not be shown. 05 09 12

1905 10 24

Having been closed for a week when it was handed over to the care of the carpenter, the Hippodrome, on Newmarket Road Cambridge reopened. The performances will now be carried out on the music hall principles, the old form of ring having been dispensed with and a large and spacious stage erected with all the necessary scenery and curtains. There will be one performance nightly with half-prices after nine o'clock. The Carr Brothers kept the house in a constant state of applause by their wonderful manipulation of a large inflated ball 05 10 24

1905 10 25

The licensee of the Cambridge Hippodrome made a claim for breach of contract against Charles Prinz, described as 'the most wonderful and sensational lion tamer on earth'. He had agreed to perform for a week at a salary of £40 but had taken another engagement at the Olympia, Liverpool. As a result their takings had fallen to £30, compared to £112 the week before. The Hippodrome would seat about 2,000 people and £25 had been taken one evening. The judge said that in his undergraduate days the University would not allow a theatre to pollute the atmosphere. They had changed their views since then. 05 10 25

1906 06 19

Thomas Askham, proprietor of the Hippodrome, Auckland Road applied for a licence for the performance of stage plays. The University had protested that a theatre near the common was detrimental to undergraduates but it would not be used as a low type of music hall, rather as a proper theatre for the poor classes at a time when students were not in residence. However the neighbourhood would not attract a first-class company and a lower type of entertainment would be detrimental to the morals of the people. 06 06 19a & b

1906 09 19

The world-famed travelling Educator of Natural History will pay Cambridge a visit after an absence of 15 years. Bostock and Wombwell's circus was instituted in February 1805 and novel additions are being made to keep pace with the times including specimens of Tasmanian Devil and the gigantic blue and red faced mandrill. In olden days shopkeepers used to close and the public declare a holiday in order to explore the menagerie. The conditions of the animals speaks volumes for the kindness and attention with which they are treated. 06 09 19a

1906 07 26

Thomas Askham applied for a licence to stage plays at the Hippodrome, Auckland Road. It was built for the poorer classes of Cambridge for whom there was no such accommodation. Plays would be presented of a high moral flavour such as 'East Lynne' & 'The Harbour Lights' which would have a good effect on the public. He would provide healthy amusement in a proper building. But local ministers felt it would not tend for the highest welfare of the people. The application was refused. 06 07 26

1906 09 19

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1907 04 02

The name of Fred Karno is synonymous with mirth and hilarity, his pantomimic sketches are popular everywhere. Two are being staged nightly at the Hippodrome, Newmarket Road which he has specially transformed into a comfortable music hall. Last night the place was crowded 07 04 02

1907 09 03

The Royal Italian Circus visited the Hippodrome, Auckland Road, Cambridge. Signor Volpi put his ponies, monkeys and dogs through their entertaining performance and the baby elephant played several instruments. An amusing scene was the carriage ride of 'Madame Batavia', a bear, dressed as a woman. It was grotesque to see the affectionate way she took the arm of her trainer and walked round the ring 07 09 03

1907 10 05

Sangers circus, p3

1907 10 12

When Sanger's Circus marched into Cambridge from Newmarket, a roadman was sitting by the side of the road near the 'Paper Mills' devouring his breakfast. The observant eye of one of the elephants was quick to perceive this, and stretching out his trunk he 'commandeered' the poor man's basket, which contained his dinner as well. 07 10 12b 07 10 05

1908 10 23

Thomas Askham, manager of the Hippodrome, Auckland Road, was convicted of staging a play, 'Sally in Our Alley' which had not been approved by the Lord Chamberlain in a building which had three times been refused a licence. Afterwards he announced that it would be turned into a picture palace and a first-class, up-to-date set of animated pictures would be presented. The old artistes would not get the sack but would sing to them every night and have their 'funniosities' all the same. He would also apply for a dramatic licence. The Hippodrome was required in Cambridge by the working classes – as a working-class theatre. CWN 08 10 23 p3, CWN 08 10 30 p3

1908 11 06

The Hippodrome, Auckland Road, applied for a full dramatic licence. It had formerly been conducted as a circus but since Easter had been to Mr Leslie who had been giving variety sketches. It had 2,080 seats priced from one penny to fourpence and was not competing with the New Theatre, where the lowest charge was sixpence. It was already licenced for music and dancing. Some councillors felt the building was quite unfit and feared the consequence of a fire; it would have a bad influence on the neighbourhood. But a theatre was a much better institution than a music hall and the application was approved. 08 11 06 p8

1910

1912 01 19

Thomas Askham was one of the oldest and best-known of Cambridge tradesmen. As a young man he worked for Thomas Hunnybun, the coach builder of Sidney Street, and then founded the coach builder businesses on Newmarket Road, Regent Street and a house in London. But as the motor industry grew, there was less for him to do and he had to employ fewer men. Jointly with Mr Tudor, he built the Hippodrome on Auckland Road, of which he was proprietor at his death. Before the era of the picture palace this place of amusement was exceedingly popular and provided many with healthy enjoyment who would otherwise have been walking the street. 12 01 19c

1913 01 03

The members of the company who are appearing in pantomime at the New Theatre had a narrow escape whilst travelling from Wolverhampton to Cambridge. Whilst the theatrical special was at a standstill, a passenger train ran into it from behind, but fortunately no life was lost. Mr Milton Bode's Company, consisting of about 50 actors and actresses was fortunately in the front of the train and beyond severe shocks, escaped without injury. Also travelling was the 'Wild Australia' Company including eight horses and a number of snakes and alligators. When the actors scrambled from the train they were mixed up with a giant python and an alligator that had escaped from their boxes 13 01 03b

1914 07 03

The Eastern Counties Circus Company, better known as the Gaiety Theatre, Auckland Road, was incorporated in September 1913. The management spent lavishly on fittings, furniture & advertising but expenditure always exceeded receipts. Then the managing director resigned and Torben Ltd worked it as a cinematograph theatre and variety show. But they made no money and left. Since then it has been empty. Now it is to close 14 07 03

1920

1920 06 28

Sylvester's Circus comparatively new; has two rings, military band, elephants, rough riders, clowns - CDN 20 06 28

1922 06 06

Circus enthusiasts who were disappointed by the non-arrival of Sylvester's Circus will find ample solace for their disappointment should they visit the Great Empire Circus this week. To describe the numerous items provided by accomplished tricksters (both animals and humans) would be well-nigh impossible. Gollywogs, tricksters, whose amazingly clever feats on cycles deservedly gain much applause. The climax of all the excitement is reached when Miss Eleonora accomplishes her daring tightrope feat entitled "The Slide for Life". Throughout the whole entertainment the audience experiences scarcely a dull moment, for which the humorous antics of several weirdly-attired clowns is largely responsible. It should be well patronised because the staff is composed entirely of ex-Service men 22 06 06

1922 06 10

The silver cup offered to the person who could make the best attempt to ride Mr F. Astley's donkey at the Great Empire Circus was duly won on Friday evening and proudly carried away by the gallant "rough-rider" who was master of the animal for a brief - very brief - period. The efforts of the competitors and the manner of their descent to earth kept the audience convulsed with laughter. A gentleman in a blazer and white flannels, who hugged a bottle lovingly to his bosom, first politely raised his hat to the animal, and then generously offered it a drink from the bottle.

1922 06 22

Midsummer Fair was proclaimed this morning by the Mayor (Councillor G.P. Hawkins) when crowds of people attended to witness the time-honoured ceremony. The old cry of "Biggest fair I've seen for years" suggests that the Fair is still growing. Thurston's roundabout are again present and number about six in all. They include their famous golden dragons, gondolas and motor scenic railways. Three circuses and numerous "laugh and grow fat" shows make up a good square mile of pleasure ground. There are the usual crockery and sweet stalls, rock kings, cheap jacks, fortune tellers and the like in unusual profusion. An objectionable feature this year is a diabolical engine that emits a banshee-like wail at frequent intervals. It ought to be smothered.

1922 11 10

Armistice Day - Remembrance Day as many people prefer to call it - once again comes round tomorrow. The occasion will be observed with all the solemnity of former years by all, not excepting the exuberant spirits who will participate in a promised 'Varsity "rag" for they will hold their noise at 11am and join with the rest in the two minutes' silence which will ensue throughout the country. The "rag" will take the form of a "circus". Undergraduates will be attired in the skins of wild animals. It is rumoured that the effigy of the ex- Kaiser will be burnt at the stake on Market Hill in the evening!

1922 11 13

If the Cambridge undergraduate can find any excuse for a "rag" he invariably organises a more or less elaborate affair. Yesterday's "circus" was a rag that everybody could enjoy; it did no harm to anybody and above all as a result of its labours aided Lord Haig's fund - "Poppy Day" - to the extent of £115 or thereabouts. The circus was a screamingly funny affair and brought everyone to doorways, windows and, in some cases, roof tops. The signal for the two minutes Armistice silence was heard in Downing-street and immediately the procession pulled up. The two minutes over pandemonium started as suddenly as it had ceased

1924 05 10

Coming! Broncho Bill's wild west exhibition and mammoth circus. Broncho Bill's world famous elephants. Broncho Bill's new group of performing prairie horses and 20 other big acts. Monday next, Midsummer Common, Cambridge. The great show will also visit Royston and Huntingdon - Advert 24 05 10

1924 05 13

Broncho Bill's circus is always a great attraction and huge crowds attended the performances at Cambridge. The programme was divided into two parts, the first half consisting of typical circus "stunts" and the second an exhibition of the wild and woolly West. The Wild West portion of the programme consists of lassoing and rope spinning, trick rifle shooting, whip stock cracking and rough riding, the whole concluding with an attack on the stage coach by Red Indians 24 05 13

1928 10 17

Sanger's circus, p7

1928 11 10 c

Carnival conditions prevailed in Cambridge where the poppy-decked shoppers met amusing spectacles on all hands. On no previous poppy day has undergraduate ingenuity been so fertile. Chief among the many attractive schemes for money squeezing was "Banger's Circus" in which an unidentifiable animal with 'flannel bag' legs, and a monkey led on a chain by a top-hatted ringmaster were noticeable. The procession was disorganised when the monkey developed a thirst and dashed into the Angel, dragging the not-unwilling circus master with him

1930

1930 04 24

Mills circus, p6

1935 04 20

The name of Bertram Mills is famous throughout the circus world. His two sons Cyril and Bernard were both up at college some 12 years ago. Cyril, who was at Corpus, had rooms with Miss Goff who now keeps a University lodging house at Maid's Causeway. She remembers him as one of a happy party of four at the house, all of whom used to ride motor-cycles. He took his MA degree the last time the circus was in Cambridge, three years ago. 35 04 20a

1936 04 29

Thirty of the smallest circus performers have arrived on the fairground at Cowper Road, Cambridge. Well-known on the Continent, these Lilliputian players range up to 36 inches in height and their 30 ponies are of similar build. They make their own village, consisting of hairdressers' shop, a newsagent, café and billiards saloon as well as their own church. There is added interest in the show as two of the tiny performers are to be married shortly 36 04 29

1937 01 16

Readers have responded with information on Keith and Tudor's circus on Midsummer Common. Mr R. Bainbridge says it was a large wooden building at the junction of Victoria Avenue, where the lamp standard is, at the corner of Jesus Grove. It was pulled down due to the expense of standing there and rebuilt at the bottom of Auckland Road. Mr Keith was the ring master and Mr Tudor was the clown. Sam George competed for a cup given by the late Charlie Rowell. It was a race 20 times around the ring over four hurdles every round. The circus finished late 1893 or early 1894 just before the Royal Show was held on Midsummer Common. He still has some of the building that was built into a shed. 37 01 16f

1937 01 22

'One with a memory' writes: "My father put Tudor's circus up twice in Cambridge and once in Ipswich and eventually at the Romsey Town Cement Works, where the main part still stands and is used by Messrs Macintosh for their ever-increasing agricultural department". He has a bill, dated June 1895 which includes six shillings and fivepence for 38 pints of beer from the 'Duke of Cambridge' for the workers. Another reader recalls Samuel Murfitt from Manea, the largest man in the world, who died 50 years ago. His girth was 100 inches and as no hearse could be found large enough he had to be conveyed on a flat. The sashes had to be taken from the windows and nearly 20 men were employed to get the body out. 37 01 22e

1937 01 23

Cambridgeshire giant, Tudor circus, p6

1937 09 21

An 80-year-old stage coach with a 78-year-old driver brought a breath of more leisurely days into Cambridge's busy streets. Drawn by four superb Dutch piebalds it is being used to draw attention to Gallaher's Park Drive cigarettes. The driver, Bob Smith, began driving in London in 1880 and continued until the horse buses went off the road. Since then he has driven for Bertram Mills in all sorts of places, including the great circus. The coaching tunes are sounded on a post horn by 15-year-old Albert Osmond. The four-in-hand is staying at the L&NER stable and will be here for a week 37 09 21a

1937 12 16

Bertram Mills, the famous circus pioneer, is being considered as a possible parliamentary candidate by the Isle of Ely Conservative Association in opposition to the sitting Liberal MP, Mr James de Rothschild. In 1919 he saw a circus show at Olympia and thought he could put on a better one himself. He was offered the venue for the next Christmas season and took on the lease without ever having staged such a show before. He toured the Continent with his son – who was up at Cambridge – and selected the first circus turns which were to make him famous. Since 1928 he has been a London County Councillor 37 12 16a

1938 04 15

Bertram Mills, circus proprietor and prospective Conservative candidate for the Isle of Ely died at his country home. – 38 04 15

1940

1941 08 30

Sanger's Circus to close due blackout, lack animal feed, petrol difficulties etc; during WWI camels and elephants used for ploughing and haulage – 41 08 30a

1944 04 28

Cody's circus five day visit – 44 04 28

1947 04 23

Among the Big Tops, Bertram Mills' tenting-circus is surely the top. It is a circus-de-luxe. To begin with every one of the 3,500 seats has a back to it and you can see in comfort. And as the animals are the backbone of the circus let us take a look at the Bertram Mills collection. First the horses - horses clever, horses dignified, horses graceful and all beautiful. Less graceful, but with their own beauty of their quiet grey colour were the six performing elephants, everyone a lady - but not lady-like enough to stifle the yawn with which they sat up after lying down to "sleep" to the strains of dreamy music. Strength was combined with grace in the Tovarisch Troupe and finally of course, there were the clowns, a merry nonsensical crew. Visitors to Bertram Mills Circus this week watching the daring acts carried out in a brilliant array of colourful costumes might be surprised to hear that as many as a thousand costumes and uniforms are used in the show. I had a talk with the wardrobe mistress, Miss Wilmer, and learnt that she designs them herself, cuts, fits and makes them. Like everybody else Bertram Mills Circus have their coupon problems - especially when costumes need replacing every year. They have two allocations by the Board of Trade but have to account for every coupon they spend and give an account of the number of yards used in each garment 47 004 23

1948 12 07

It is a good many years since there was a circus at the New Theatre, which makes this week's visit of Don Ross's Royal Imperial Circus all the more welcome. Everything that makes a circus is here – with the one notable exception of the elephants. There are the horses, dogs, monkeys, wire-walkers, the trapeze artiste, the lions, and the clowns – even two performing geese (said to be the only ones in the world). All the acts are interspersed with the appearance of the clowns, Edgar Cooke, Little Alf Pratley and Rabbit who also appears with a trampoline (one of those bouncing affairs) and invites members of the audience to have a go 48 12 07

1950

1950 04 11

Bertram Mills' circus elephants will lend their weight to the National Savings drive when they arrive in Cambridge. Starting from the railway station the six elephants will parade through the streets to Midsummer Common, carrying as their trappings photographic reproductions of the well-known savings poster having a white elephant as its subject. All will be ready for the menagerie attached to the circus to be opened from Saturday afternoon 50 04 11

1950 04 11

Bertram Mill's famous "big top" show has opened in Cambridge. Here in the well-known romantic atmosphere, strangely fascinating in its queer smell of sawdust and canvas, is paraded an amazing display of human and animal talent. Have you ever seen dogs play football? Or a lion walk at tightrope? Or elephants that do the elephant equivalent of a handstand? Or ... but this review is in danger of becoming a mere catalogue of questions – an instance of the mood of questioning wonderment the Circus is apt to induce in the onlooker 50 04 11

1951 05 01

Billy Smart's circus, p5

1952 03 05

Circus – human cannonball, p10

1952 03 11

Chipperfield's Circus opened on Midsummer Common, Cambridge. A whole collection of animals show their paces and tricks including polar and grizzly bears, African lions and horses, while a "cowboy round-up" brings plenty of action. It goes with a Big Bang, especially the sensational final item, by Les Raluys, in which a man and girl are shot together from a big cannon, landing in a net on the other side of the ring. If the bang doesn't take your breath away the flight of the human cannonballs will. 52 03 111

1952 03 14

Over 4,000 people rose suddenly to their feet at Chipperfield's Circus. It was near the end when the only double cannon act in the country was taking place. The two performers had entered the cannon and been shot into the air but as they fell the safety net gave way and they hit the ground. As there was no serious injury to either performer the act will go on as usual tonight. 52 03 14

1953 04 03

Professor Testo's flea circus is currently featured in the Easter fair on Midsummer Common. There are jugglers, tight-rope walkers and acrobats all of whom live in a felt-lined cigar box. It is rather difficult to get fleas these days, he says. "They must be human fleas. Animal fleas don't live long enough and they're not as strong. Usually we advertise for them, but if I get really short I get them sent from the College of Entymology. By looking after them carefully, and feeding them regularly on my own blood, I can keep them alive for about three months. I will pay sixpence each for the m. But I don't want any of your thin, half-starved ones. They must be fat and well fed". 53 04 03

1953 04 20

The circus has come to town – and it was greeted by thousands of smiling Cambridge faces. Six of Bertram Mills' Burmese elephants marched from the railway station, trunk to tail as the midget clown, Nikki, distributed leaflets about the circus from the basket of his fairy cycle. Elephants Lechney and Company did not lose their way – they've taken the same stroll for the last 18 years. Crowds covered the roundabout at Hills Road. The one at the Four Lamps was unrecognisable, the circus-gazers had swept half-way across the road. Soon afterwards the 'two-ton-tessies; were under canvas, chained to a platform. 53 04 20

1954 09 28

The crowds who queued up for tickets outside Cambridge's New Theatre put paid to the story that Music Hall is dying. There was slap-stick comedy, Eddie Arnold with his variety of voices, Brian Andro on the high-wire, a strong-man acrobat, Rusty – a dog of mathematical powers, Bobby Collins – a first-rate whistler and the Lee Youngsters, a trio of singers. The star attraction was Tony Brent, a crooner of promise, but surely there will come a time when we shall have heard his songs just once too often. Forthcoming attractions include Don Saunder's Circus and Don Lammaree and his Lone Star Road Show, Phyllis Dixey and Cinderella on Ice. If the Cambridge public give it support then even bigger names will be attracted from London. CDN 28.9.1954

1955 03 15

With the big top a blaze of coloured lights, people streamed to Midsummer Common to fill Chipperfields' Circus to capacity. It is the first time any circus has presented such a varied collection of animals, which include camels, llamas, zebras, a giraffe and Indian pythons. Polar bears are difficult to tame but Ricardo gets them to waltz, the black and grizzly bears delight the children, especially when one drinks a bottle of milk. The African lions were a little restless and snarled at Ricardo, but he made them form a pyramid and then lie at his feet. The seals balances balls, the oodles rode a pony round the ring and one of the elephants even did a handstand. 55 03 15a

1956 04 21

Moving Bertram Mills circus from town to town is a massive undertaking. The catering manager has a real problem. Practically every human mouth in the show is his responsibility and he works a week ahead, buying all his supplies from the tradespeople in the place the circus is to visit. Imagine walking into a grocer's shop and demanding a half-ton of potatoes, or calling on the local dairy for 77 gallons of milk. But the well-fed, contented faces on the show ground are a testimony to his efficiency. 56 04 21a

1957 10 24

On Midsummer Common tents are mushrooming in readiness for Billy Smart's Circus. The show promises plenty of interest, thrills galore, glamour and excitement. In the Big Top 23 acts of superlative ability will perform twice daily. Amongst them are Tagora the sword-swallower, the Flying Lunasz trapeze stars, the Atlas Sahara Troupe of tumblers and the Larenty Troupe of trampoline artistes. Then there are the clowns led by Sasha Coco. The Wild West Show is a fast-riding affair of cowboys and Indians featuring Davy Crockett and the 'Cisco Kid. 57 10 24a & 23

1957 10 29

Billy Smart's circus show started with a parade of elephants, camels, seals, horses, chimpanzees and the artistes themselves. Then came his Arabian and Palomino horses, dancing, prancing and galloping around the ring, performing amazing tricks. The Rock 'n' Roll Elephants nearly brought the tent down with laughter: attired in jeans, one of these intelligent creatures expertly imitated Elvis Presley. To see the beautifully-groomed polar bears glissading down the slides with every evidence of enjoyment made one realise how the animals can find fun pleasing the audience. 57 10 29a

1958 10 09

A new high in circus history will be reached when Chipperfields open at Midsummer Common. That fantastic character, "Mr Pastry", international star of stage, screen and television, following terrific success on the Ed Sullivan TV shows in America, bounces into the sawdust ring to become an even greater name as Star of the Circus. There will be side-splitting yells when he joins the Western Rough Riding Routine. 58 10 09b, 58 10 14 & a

1959 04 21

Bertram Mills' circus began their visit to Cambridge under the big top on Midsummer Common. The huge canvas auditorium with improbable little bits of grass still visible between the rows of seats was packed to the walls. The ring was immaculate with white sawdust, and high above it the roof held the promise of balancing feats to come. The performance opened with the entrance of an elephant in a pink bonnet driving a yellow motor car accompanied by a cavalcade of clowns and augustes. 59 04 21b & c

1960s The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960 09 03

As advance manager of Billy Smart's circus Reg Mankin must arrange for regular deliveries to Midsummer Common of 300 pints of milk a day, newspapers, laundry and cleaning as well as meat, fruit and vegetables. Then there is bread and cakes and the gas to cook it all on. Besides the provisions for the 300 artists and staff there are the needs of the 200 animals whose appetites are much larger than any human's. In one week they consume ten tons of hay, 600lb of horsemeat for the five hungry lions, 140lb of rice for the 12 polar bears and 12 sacks of stale bread for the elephants. 60 09 03

1961 10 29

Chipperfield's circus televised for Christmas show – 61 10 29b

1963 03 18

The circus came to Cambridge, not in glittering costumes but in best suits to Great St Andrew's church. The occasion was the wedding of Jeoffrey Nicholson, a clown with Bertram Mills Circus to Patricia O'Dell from Quay. The couple first saw one another when the circus came to Cambridge three years ago, but it was not until recently that they met again. Amongst the personalities was Jacko, a fellow clown. After a reception at the Garden House Hotel the couple left for a honeymoon before returning to the circus. 63 03 18a

1966 09 19

Circus elephant parade – photo – 66 09 19

1970

1971 05 24

Billy Smart's circus procession Hills Road – photo – 71 05 24

1974 11 11

Circus elephant parade, p4

1975 03 01

The bizarre sight of city-suited lawyers in mud-covered town shoes, sorting out llamas, camels & elephants in a disused coal yard at Cottenham brought to an end the sage of Circus Hoffman. Earlier in the day the villagers had been treated to the unique sight of a high court tipstaff, complete with court orders and warrants, being chased by a baby elephant. It was all part of the tragi-comedy which opened last November when one of the four brothers running Circus Hoffman decided on a unilateral declaration of independence and peeled off what he considered was his chunk of the circus and headed for Cambridge from London. The final curtain was lowered amidst tears and curses when the peeled-off chunk re-joined the whole

1975 04 23

Austin circus, p6

1979 05 22

Peace returned to the Big Top at the weekend and it was possible to enjoy two major artistic events without the accompaniment of heavy rain on canvas, whistling wind and a variety of off-stage rumblings. For the first time in a fortnight consecutive performances were staged without the artists and audience being drenched and deafened, though they had to be on their guard against damp patches on the walkways and duck-boards. It is a visit the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company is unlikely to forget. But the foul weather may trigger off a discussion on Cambridge's future as a regional artistic centre. There are few cities where such keen following can be found for top-rate entertainment and the large audiences deserve something better than a circus tent on a patch of churned-up grass.

1980

1984 05 10

Gerry Cottle's new circus without animals opened its canvas doors on Midsummer Common. Why make animals suffer when you can be as cruel as you please to human beings? You can hurl knives at them, string them up by their hair, jump on them and even force them to run flaming sticks along their arms and chest. Many of the performers are students of the first British Circus School which has brought young people from outside the close-knit circus community and trained them to be professional circus artists in the company of older hands. 84 05 10 p7

1984 05 10

Fossett circus, p5

1984 08 18

Tudor's circus – history – 84 08 18 p15

